

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-14-639](#), a report to congressional addressees

Why GAO Did This Study

Leadership involvement and accountability are important factors driving successful performance improvement in government. GPRAMA established the role of the agency priority goal leader and assigned accountability for achieving APGs to these officials.

This report is one of a series in which GAO, as required by GPRAMA, reviewed the act's implementation. It assesses (1) the roles and responsibilities of agency priority goal leaders in managing goal progress and the extent to which they are held accountable for goal achievement; (2) the extent to which goal leaders collaborate with other programs and agencies that contribute to APG achievement; and (3) any challenges and practices identified by goal leaders, and the extent to which they exchange this information with their peers.

To address all three objectives, GAO examined nearly half (47 of 103) of the APGs for 2012 and 2013, and analyzed relevant documentation. GAO also interviewed the goal leaders and other relevant officials for each of the 47 selected goals.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that OMB work with agencies to (1) ensure that they appoint deputy goal leaders; and (2) more clearly link goal leaders' and deputies' performance plans to APGs, and work with the PIC to further involve goal leaders and deputies in information-sharing related to APGs. OMB staff generally agreed with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-14-639](#). For more information, contact J. Christopher Mihm at (202) 512-6806 or mihmj@gao.gov.

July 2014

MANAGING FOR RESULTS:

Enhanced Goal Leader Accountability and Collaboration Could Further Improve Agency Performance

What GAO Found

Agency priority goal leaders GAO interviewed were generally highly-placed within their agencies—for example, several were heads of agencies—and reported a range of responsibilities related to managing agency priority goals (APG), such as laying out goal strategies. A majority of the goal leaders said the goal leader designation had benefits for their APGs, such as greater visibility for the goal. Several also believed that there were benefits to designating the goal leader position in conjunction with other requirements from the GPRAMA Modernization Act of 2010 (GPRAMA), such as reviewing priority goal progress at least quarterly. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) directs agencies to appoint deputy goal leaders. Deputy goal leaders manage day-to-day implementation of APGs and provide continuity in the event of goal leader turnover. From the time the APGs were published in February 2012 to the end of fiscal year 2013 (when they were to have been achieved), about 40 percent of the APGs GAO examined had a change in goal leader, while about 30 percent had a change in the deputy position. In addition, although most of the 46 goal leaders GAO interviewed had formal deputy goal leaders in place, 11 (24 percent) did not. Without a designated deputy goal leader, agencies lack a formally designated official to fill a key role in goal implementation. Individual performance plans are one of several mechanisms to provide goal leader and deputy goal leader accountability for APGs. Most goal leaders and all deputy goal leaders had performance plans. These plans covered a range of responsibilities, but generally did not fully reflect their APGs. In fact, many did not refer to the APG. Performance plans that link more directly to APGs could help ensure that officials are evaluated on and held responsible for APG progress and outcomes.

Goal leaders collaborated with officials from outside their agencies to drive progress on APGs. However, some goal leaders reported that these outside contributors were not included in the quarterly performance reviews. Goal leaders also reported that a variety of different types of programs, such as grant and regulatory programs, contribute to their APGs. However, they reported few mechanisms for sharing information with other agencies related to assessing these programs. Further, for a variety of reasons agencies have focused less attention on identifying the tax expenditures that contribute to their APGs. These findings are consistent with prior recommendations GAO made to OMB regarding GPRAMA implementation. OMB has taken some steps to address the recommendations.

Goal leaders identified some common challenges and practices in managing APGs, but shared this information to a limited extent. For example, goal leaders commonly cited resource constraints as a challenge, and practices related to measuring goal progress as helpful. One of the roles of the Performance Improvement Council (PIC), a council made up of agency performance improvement officers and chaired by OMB, is to facilitate information exchange. The PIC has shared tools and information with goal leaders; however PIC staff's primary points of contact are agencies' performance improvement officers and their deputies. Overall, goal leaders and their deputies have had little direct interaction with the PIC. More direct outreach from PIC staff could facilitate information sharing among goal leaders and their deputies, and help ensure that they do not miss opportunities to better manage their APGs.